DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
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INCOMING TELEGRAM *Department of State*

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PP RUEHC
DE RUMJIR 26779 1461120
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P R 261020Z MAY 67
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY
INFO RUHHHQA/CINCPAC
STATE GRNC
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1967 MAY 26 AM 8:31

EXCISE

S E C R E T SAIGON 26779

EXDIS

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

SUBJECT: THIEU-KY

REF: SAIGON 26674

1. [redacted] SPENT THREE HOURS [redacted] WITH GENERAL THIEU AND THEN HAD SUPPER WITH KY. FOLLOWING ARE IMPRESSIONS HE GAVE US AFTER THESE TALKS.

2. THIEU DESCRIBED IN GREAT DETAIL THE ENTIRE HISTORY OF WHAT HAD HAPPENED AS SEEN BY HIM. HE SAID THE DIFFICULTY HAD ITS ORIGIN IN THE MEETING AMONG THE GENERALS ON MARCH 31, WHICH HE HAD DESCRIBED TO AMBASSADOR LODGE (SAIGON 23667). HE HAD INTERPRETED THAT MEETING AS INDICATING GENERAL SUPPORT FOR HIS CANDIDACY, WHEREAS, ACCORDING TO [redacted] THE OTHER GENERALS WERE TRYING IN A POLITE WAY TO LET THIEU KNOW THEY WERE NOT SUPPORTING HIM. [redacted] CONCLUDED IT HAD ALL BEEN TOO SUBTLE AND TOO VIETNAMESE AND THE RESULT WAS A VERY BASIC MISUNDERSTANDING AMONG ALL CONCERNED. THIEU SAID THAT THONG'S SUBSEQUENT VISIT ON APRIL 18 TO INFORM HIM OF THE GENERALS' SUPPORT FOR KY, CAME AS A COMPLETE SHOCK AND SURPRISE TO HIM.

3. [redacted] BELIEVES THIEU IS NOW DEEPLY BITTER AND FEELS ISOLATED AND WITHOUT SUPPORT. [redacted] SAID ONLY GENERAL P.X. CHIEU AND GENERAL DANG VAN QUANG REMAIN CLOSE TO HIM.) THIEU TOLD [redacted] HE DID NOT BELIEVE HE COULD WIN THE PRESIDENCY BUT HIS PERSONAL PRESTIGE GAVE HIM NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO STAY IN THE RACE. HE DESCRIBED TO [redacted] HIS MEETING WITH GENERAL WESTMORELAND ON MAY 7 (SAIGON 24932) AND EXPRESSED DOUBT THAT THE OTHER GENERALS WOULD IN ANY CASE ACCEPT HIM AS CHIEF

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OF JGS, SINCE FEELINGS HAVE BECOME SO DEEPLY AROUSED ON BOTH SIDES.

4. SAID THAT THIEU WAS ALSO BITTER ABOUT THE AMERICAN PRESS WHICH HE FELT HAD SOUGHT TO FIND AND WIDEN DIFFERENCES AMONG THE GENERALS BY PLAYING UP VARIOUS OFF-THE-CUFF REACTIONS AND STATEMENTS. HE TOLD THAT WHEN HE RETURNS TO WASHINGTON HE CAN REASSURE THE PRESIDENT ONCE MORE THAT HE (THIEU) IS A TRUE VIETNAMESE PATRIOT AND WILL NOT PERMIT THESE DIFFERENCES TO SPLIT THE ARMED FORCES OR THE COUNTRY.

5. TALKED LATER TO KY AND THE LATTER TOLD HIM HE WAS READY TO DO WHATEVER MIGHT BE NECESSARY TO REASSURE THIEU OF THE GENERALS' SUPPORT FOR HIM, INCLUDING AN APOLOGY ON BEHALF OF ALL OF THEM IF THIS WERE CALLED FOR. ACCORDING TO KY CONSIDERS THAT THE ROLE AS HEAD OF THE ARMED FORCES IS VITALLY IMPORTANT AND HE HOPED THIEU WOULD COME TO SEE IT THIS WAY.

6. SAID THAT FOLLOWING THESE TWO CONVERSATIONS HE WAS PERSUADED THAT PERSONAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THIEU AND KY WERE NOT SERIOUSLY DAMAGED BUT HE FEARED THIS WAS NOT THE CASE FOR RELATIONS BETWEEN THEIU AND THE OTHER TOP GENERALS. CONCLUDED THAT THERE IS ABOUT A MONTH BEFORE A FINAL DECISION WOULD HAVE TO BE ANNOUNCED IF THIEU IS TO RUN FOR THE PRESIDENCY AND HE THOUGHT THIEU HAD NOT YET REALLY MADE THIS DECISION. HE HOPED THAT TIME AND RESTRAINT ON ALL SIDES, PARTICULARLY WITH RESPECT TO INTERVIEWS AND STATEMENTS TO THE PRESS, WOULD PERHAPS HEAL THE SITUATION SUFFICIENTLY TO ALLOW THE PRINCIPAL PARTIES TO WORK OUT A MUTUALLY SATISFACTORY SOLUTION. SIAD HE COUNSELED KY NOT TO PRESS THE MATTER UNDULY AND TO RESTRAIN THE OTHER GNERALS FROM STIRRING IT UP UNNECESSARILY. HE THOUGHT THIEU AND KY COULD STILL GET TOGETHER AND DISCUSS THE QUESTION RATIONALLY BETWEEN THEMSELVES BUT THIS SHOULD NOT BE DONE TOO QUICKLY AND MUST BE DONE WITH SOME FRAMEWORK OF A SOLUTION IN MIND.

7. ELABORATED SOMEWHAT MORE ON HIS AND KY'S BELIEF IN THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDINGS AMONG THE CHEIF PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES TO ASSURE BROAD CIVILIAN-MILITARY COOPERATION AFTER THE ELECTIONS. REFERRING TO THE HUONG-KY TALK, SAID HE BELIEVED THAT THE FINAL CABINET SELECTED BY THE WINNER SHOULD SEEK TO INCLUDE IN IMPORTANT POSITIONS CANDIDATES RUNNING ON LOSING TICKETS. THOUGHT KY MIGHT IN FACT MAKE SOME STATEMENT ALONG THESE GENERAL LINES IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

8. WITH RESPECT TO THE ELECTORAL LAW AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY, SAID KY HAD INTERVENED TO PREVENT THE DIRECTORATE FROM TAKING AN UNDULY HARD POSITION IN ITS LETTER TO THE CA ABOUT THE

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-3-,, 26779, MAY 26, FROM SAIGON

DESIRED CHANGES IN THE LAW. HE HAD INSTRUCTED THAT THE LETTER BE PHRASED IN A CONCILIATORY TONE AND HAD BEEN BUSY MAY 25 SEEING KEY CA MEMBERS TO PREPARE THE WAY FOR IT. ACCORDING TO KY CONSIDERED IT VITAL TO ELICIT CA COOPERATION AND WORK OUT AN ACCEPTABLE UNDERSTANDING WITH THEM. HE WAS CONFIDENT THAT THIS COULD BE DONE.

9. COMMENT: IT IS EVIDENT THAT [redacted] HAS BEEN ABLE TO PLAY A USEFUL MEDIATING ROLE AND REMAINS ONE OF THE FEW INFLUENTIAL PERSONS WHO CAN TALK FRANKLY AND INTIMATELY WITH BOTH THIEU AND KY. HIS COMMENTS AND HIS DESCRIPTION OF KY'S VIEWS ON A POSSIBLE SOLUTION CLEARLY INDICATE KY'S CONTINUING INTENTION TO RUN AND TO WIN. IF THIS REMAINS THE CASE, AS WE BELIEVE, KY WILL BE EAGER TO FIND A SOLUTION FOR THIEU WHICH IS ACCEPTABLE TO HIM AND TO THE OTHER GENERALS, AND WHICH WILL NOT SPLIT KY'S POTENTIAL SUPPORT, BOTH MILITARY AND CIVILIAN.

10. [redacted] REMARKS ABOUT FUTURE CIVILIAN-MILITARY COOPERATION ARE ENCOURAGING, BUT A PUBLIC STATEMENT BY KY ALONG THESE LINES WILL CLEARLY BE MORE IN HIS INTEREST THAN IN THOSE OF THE CIVILIAN CANDIDATES. IT MIGHT ALSO SERVE TO UNDERCUT SOMEWHAT THE EFFECT OF ANY EFFORT BY THIEU TO THROW HIS WEIGHT BEHIND A CIVILIAN CANDIDATE OR JOIN WITH ONE.

11. I BELIEVE THAT WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO LET THE VIETNAMESE CARRY THE BALL IN TRYING TO RESOLVE THIS PROBLEM. I AM SEEING BOTH THIEU AND KY AND WILL GET INTO THESE MATTERS IN A GENERAL WAY, AS INSTRUCTED, BUT WILL NOT SEEK TO INTERVENE DIRECTLY IN TERMS OF A SOLUTION UNLESS THIS SHOULD APPEAR NECESSARY AT A LATER DATE.

BUNKER

NOTE: ADVANCE COPY TO S/S-O, 5-26-67, 10:30 am
PASSED WHITE HOUSE, CIA, DOD, 5-26-67, 10:30 am

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